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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [KU](#) [FREEDOM](#) [AGENDA](#)
SUBJECT: ELECTION COUNTDOWN: YOUTH ACTIVISTS HIGHLIGHT
FRAGILITY OF LIBERAL-ISLAMIST ALLIANCE FOR REFORM

REF: A. KUWAIT 2271
[1](#)B. KUWAIT 2150

Classified By: CDA Matt Tueller for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C/NF) In a June 26 meeting with Poloff, "orange movement" (ref B) leaders Kahled Al-Fadhalah, Jassem Al-Maqamis, and Dana Al-Salem shared their views on the upcoming elections. All three studied in the U.S. and were active in the U.S. branch of the National Union of Kuwait Students (NUKS). Both Al-Fadhalah and Al-Maqamis cited their experience in the U.S., and specifically their involvement in student organizations, as the primary impetus for their activism in Kuwait. Al-Maqamis, who volunteered for the Kerry campaign, said he learned first-hand the power of political activism and was inspired to do something about the problems he saw in Kuwait rather than just sit back apathetically. Likewise, the three activists' example inspired other Kuwaitis to join them in calling on the Government to adopt political reforms. All they needed was a spark, Al-Fadhalah said.

A Fragile Alliance

[1](#)2. (C/NF) They acknowledged, however, the difficulties in maintaining the pro-reform momentum. Already, there were some signs that the liberal-Islamist alliance at the heart of the pro-reform movement was beginning to fragment as each group jockeyed for political position in these elections, a development noted recently by several columnists. Al-Fadhalah claimed the Kuwaiti Muslim Brotherhood (KMB) in particular was playing politics, backing conservative candidates running against more liberal incumbents, like veteran MP Ahmed Al-Saadoun. The KMB's willingness to undermine more liberal pro-reform MPs merely to increase their own influence could "leave a bad taste in our mouth" and undermine the cohesion of the new pro-reform block in Parliament, he explained. (Comment: Other liberal contacts have similarly questioned the Islamists' commitment to reform (ref A). Islamist contacts, on the other hand, insist that their support for reform is genuine and point out that they have long been vocal advocates of political reform. End comment.)

[1](#)3. (C/NF) Ironically, Al-Fadhalah said Salafi candidates were less duplicitous and more willing to work together with liberals to promote reform. He cited as an example Waleed Al-Tabtabaei, an outspoken Islamist incumbent, whom he said they found "kinda cute" once they got to know him. Ultimately, though, they were not overly optimistic that the pro-reform alliance would hold together into the next Parliament. They were also skeptical that newly elected MPs, having spent so much money getting elected, would be willing to put their political careers on the line to pressure the

Government to adopt political reforms. Despite these concerns, they said they would keep up their pro-reform campaign and hoped the new MPs would make electoral reform a top priority.

A "Vision for Reform"

¶4. (SBU/NF) These youth activists are not the only ones championing reform and working to combat corruption, however. The Kuwait Transparency Society (KTS), a local NGO, has drafted a document entitled, "Kuwait Vision for Reform," that outlines 12 reform objectives (see para 6). According to local press reports, "a large number of candidates, political activists, and members of trade unions" have already signed the document. A number of prominent Islamist candidates, like Al-Tabtabaei and Jassem Al-Kandari were among the signatories. It remains to be seen what influence this and other similar measures will have on the new Parliament.

¶5. (C/NF) Comment: Post shares these youth activists' concern that popular enthusiasm for reform will diminish after the elections, particularly as many Kuwaitis leave for extended summer vacations abroad. We are currently examining ways to engage pro-reform activists and to use MEPI funds to maintain the momentum for reform. Just one example, on July 3 the Charge is hosting an ice cream social for youth activists to discuss how they can continue to constructively advocate for change in Kuwait. The grassroots, pro-reform activism and anti-corruption campaigns of these elections present a unique opportunity for the USG to support political reform in Kuwait. End comment.

¶6. (U) Begin text of "Kuwait Vision for Reform."

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On the occasion of the elections for the 11th Kuwaiti Parliament and given the current problems of vote-buying and all sorts of corruption that Kuwait is facing, we the undersigned vow by signing this document to realize the following goals:

- ¶1. Present an amendment to the law on constituencies slashing them to five or one during the first session of the upcoming Parliament.
- ¶2. Ratify the United Nations Convention against Corruption.
- ¶3. Re-introduce the law on financial accountability that was approved by the 10th Parliament's Budget and Closing Accounts Committee.
- ¶4. Issue a law establishing a board for combating corruption.
- ¶5. Ratify the proposal for an administrative reform organization to combat administrative corruption in governmental agencies.
- ¶6. Issue a law streamlining election campaigns, reinforcing freedoms, and prohibiting electoral corruption.
- ¶7. Review the State property systems to better protect and maintain public funds.
- ¶8. Revise the State's procurement systems.
- ¶9. Insist that the Ministry of Education teach the importance of transparency, social development, and combating corruption.
- ¶10. Insist that the Information Ministry work to combat all forms of corruption through news and other programming.
- ¶11. Stand by all issues of reform and ratifying all relevant legislation.
- ¶12. Work to combat all forms of corruption through effective parliamentary tools.

End text.

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